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SUBJECT: EU-SOUTH AFRICA SUMMIT: NO BREAKTHROUGHS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: There were no breakthroughs at the July 25 EU-South Africa Summit in Bordeaux. As was expected, the two sides did not reach agreement on an EU-South Africa Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) because of South Africa's insistence that it be accorded certain privileges available to other Southern African Development Community (SADC) members under an EU-SADC EPA. Both sides repeated their positions on Zimbabwe (EU favoring leverage through sanctions, South Africa backing President Mbeki's mediation efforts) without directly criticizing each other. They took similar positions on Darfur, with South Africa refraining from joining in strong EU criticism of the Khartoum regime and Sudan President Bashir. No new EU-South Africa summits are in the works but the two sides agreed to meet periodically at ambassador level within the EU COPS (Political and Security Committee) framework. Dynamics between Sarkozy and Mbeki are reported as good. The Summit was shortened at French behest to allow President Sarkozy to return comfortably to Paris in time to meet with Senator Obama later that day, an event that may have limited press coverage of the meeting in Bordeaux. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) MFA South Africa Desk Officer Frederic Chole and his successor, Franck Marchetti, on July 29 provided a readout on the July 25 EU-South Africa Summit that took place in Bordeaux. President Sarkozy headed the French EU Presidency team, with EU Commission President Barroso and President Mbeki leading their respective delegations. Chole said that from the French perspective, the three key issues were (1) EU-South Africa relations pursuant to an EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) the two sides had been trying to conclude; (2) Zimbabwe; and (3) Sudan/Darfur.

Economic Partnership Agreement

¶3. (C) Neither side believed that an EPA would be signed at the Bordeaux meeting, Chole said. The problem was that the EU already had in place an EPA with SADC. Under that EPA, certain SADC members benefit from favorable terms. Now that the EU and South Africa were trying to negotiate an EPA between the EU and South Africa, the South Africans had been insisting that the EPA provide advantages similar to those available to some of the SADC members under the EU-SADC EPA. This, Chole said, the EU was reluctant to do, in the belief that South Africa, relative to other SADC members, was too big and no longer deserved favorable consideration. Chole said that both sides well knew before the Summit the position of the other and that neither side seemed likely to compromise. So, regarding an eventual EPA, both sides at the Summit said that they would continue working to achieve an EPA.

Zimbabwe

¶4. (C) Zimbabwe was a major point of discussion in Bordeaux. Chole noted that just prior to the Summit, a number of things had taken place that affected the EU-South Africa discussion -- the failure to obtain sanctions against Zimbabwe at the UN, the willingness of the Mugabe and opposition camps to discuss sharing power as a result of Mbeki's effort (along with his continuing role as mediator), and the EU's decision to increase its own sanctions against Zimbabwe. Mbeki, Chole observed, entered the Summit from a position of strength concerning Zimbabwe, as a result of these recent events. In the end, both sides reiterated their basic positions, with the EU critical of the Mugabe regime, placing importance on the EU's decision to increase sanctions, and mildly supportive of Mbeki's mediator role. The South Africans emphasized the positive role Mbeki had been playing.

¶5. (C) Chole said that France acted to soften the position of EU members, many of which wanted the EU to take a firmer anti-Mugabe stance and to be more critical of what some viewed as shortcomings in Mbeki's mediation effort. The French reminded EU partners that Mbeki deserved deference on the EU's part in view of the immediacy of the problem South Africa faced with its neighbor Zimbabwe in chaos. Moreover, Mbeki knew the situation and key personalities in a way that Europeans never could. "He also projected great sincerity in discussing his efforts regarding Zimbabwe," Chole remarked. Chole said that the rest of the EU agreed to take a more moderate stance after the French had worked to achieve that end.

Darfur

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¶6. (C) Chole said that Darfur, while of great concern to all parties, did not receive the intense attention devoted to the EPA and Zimbabwe. Here too, he said, both sides essentially stated positions that they had previously held, with the EU more critical of Khartoum, while South Africa, although deploring the general conditions in Darfur, refrained from specifics concerning individuals (such as Bashir) and what should be done about them.

Dynamics

¶7. (C) Chole said the dynamics of the meeting were generally good. One "problem" for the French, he confided, was making sure that Sarkozy acted as the representative of the EU Presidency and not as the defender of strictly French interests. Sarkozy managed to do that. Chole said that personal relations between Sarkozy and Mbeki had always been good and seemed to be getting better. Before the two had met, there was some concern that they would not mesh well, given Sarkozy's hyperactive extroverted nature and what was perceived as Mbeki's cooler, more detached personality. However, they broke the ice during Sarkozy's February 2008 visit to South Africa, were now on a first-name basis, and enjoyed each other's company, with Mbeki not seeming to mind Sarkozy's backslapping ways.

¶8. (C) When asked, Chole said that there were no plans to conduct a second EU-South Africa Summit, to the slight disappointment of the South Africans. He noted, however, that both sides agreed to hold periodic meetings at ambassador level within the framework of the EU's Political and Security Committee (COPS).

¶9. (C) The only real hitch was South African displeasure that the French side asked and were able to compress the session. The plenary meeting was shortened by 30 minutes and Sarkozy "left the lunch table as soon as the dessert plates were removed." The reason for his hurry? He needed to return to Paris forthwith to be able to meet with Senator Obama later that day. This left the South Africans feeling a bit neglected, but "they understood," Chole said. He

regretted that the Bordeaux meeting received minimal press coverage, in France or elsewhere, with few articles or TV reports and none of any depth. "We all know where the French and other European press wanted to be that day," he said, "and it wasn't Bordeaux. That we understand, too."

BIO

¶10. (C/NF) Chole will leave the South Africa desk and go to Ethiopia as the number 3 person at the French Embassy (head of pol/econ). He is looking forward to the assignment. We have found him to be an excellent interlocutor -- gracious, patient, calm, and free of any trace of the "attitude" one sometimes finds at the MFA. He always conducts meetings with us in one of the MFA's lounges, over coffee he provides. We have also worked well with his successor, Franck Marchetti, whose previous posting was in the MFA's Protocol Office.

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